

THE METHODIST CHURCH – NORTHAMPTON DISTRICT

Minutes of District Synod (Representative Session) held on 9 September 2023 at St Andrew's, Leicester Forest East

District Chair : The Rev'd Canon Helen D Cameron BA, MPhil, MCSP
Synod Secretary : Paul Spray

1. Welcome

Revd Helen Bell (Superintendent in the Leicester West Circuit) and Revd Jimione Kaci (minister at St Andrew's) welcomed us, and Synod responded with shouts of "Bula".

2. Worship

Revd Dr Israel Selvanayagam and Deacon Sharon Dilley led our opening worship. A copy has been placed on the District website.

3. Opening business

Scrutineers were appointed from the Hinckley Circuit.

Attendance: The Synod was held in hybrid format with 80 members on site and others attending online on 53 screens.

A dispensation had been granted to the Rev'd Nina Johnson , and partial dispensations to the Rev'd Dr Samantha Gillard and the Rev'd Derek McLean. There are 22 supernumerary ministers who have permanent dispensations.

Apologies had been received from 8 supernumerary ministers and 14 lay members of the Synod.

Deaths: The Synod noted the death since the last representative session of the Synod, of the Rev'd Richard Donaghue, the Rev'd Dougie Dennis, and Peter Green. The meeting gave thanks in prayer for their life and service.

New ministers: The Chair welcomed eighteen ministers new to their posts in the District: the Rev'ds Heather Noel-Smith, Bruce Thompson, Nigel Ogle, Jocelyn Bennett, Frances Ballantyne, Helen White, Jimione Kaci, Karen Beecham, Andrew Lomax, Nina Johnson, Samantha Gillard, Nathan Falla, Jane Gaffney, William Booker, Paul Cockburn, David Haseldine, Rachael Prince and Hee Gon Moon. Matt Robinson was welcomed as a new lay member of Synod.

Letters of greeting were sent to the Rev'd Dr Samantha Gillard, Wendy Curtis, Christine Green, and Nigel and Pam Sweet.

4. Conference 2023

Synod watched a video, prepared by Matt Forsyth, of reflections on Conference from the District representatives. The video will be available on the District website. We warmly applauded the news that our Chair, the Rev'd Canon Helen Cameron, had been elected as President-designate.

The Rev'd Noel Nhariswa spoke about his experience of Conference, where he had been received into full connexion on moving from Zimbabwe to Britain. He had appreciated a Spirit-filled service, and had found himself revived, equipped and empowered.

The Rev'd Stephen Spain had been ordained during Conference, in a joyful celebration against the spectacular backdrop of Coventry Cathedral. He spoke of a church aware of the challenges, but with a deep desire to grow in holiness and spread the gospel of Christ.

5. Guest speakers: *Confident Christianity in multifaith Britain*

The Revd Dr Tom Wilson, Director of St Philips Centre, introduced his Moslem colleague Sumaiya Mulla and his Sikh colleague Kartar Singh Bring. He suggested that good interfaith relations were built on the themes of hospitality, service and proclamation. The three speakers found that interfaith conversation allowed them to be authentically faithful in their own journeys, and gave examples of learning from other faiths that gave a deeper understanding of their own faiths. Asked for specific messages for Methodists, they suggested that we keep on listening; live out our vocation in service; and sing!

They demonstrated the value of hospitality in the most practical way possible: a very large tray of delicious samosas.

The Chair thanked them warmly. A retiring collection was taken in aid of St Philip's Centre; £204.10p was collected in the church, whilst those online had been invited to transfer funds to the St Philip's bank account.

6. Election of District representatives to Conference 2024

The Rev'ds Calvin Cheung, Miriam Moul and Bekkie Wright were elected as presbyteral representatives, and Anna Herriman, Olive Ruzvidzo and Paul Spray as lay. They join Matt Forsyth, who is serving a three-year term as a lay representative. The Chair thanked those who had put their names forward as candidates.

7. District Mission

Matt Forsyth introduced the new District Mission Team, which he heads. He emphasised that the whole team is "here to help." In addition to his own wide-ranging role,

- Mel Brown, based at Overstone near Northampton, offers expertise on Methodist presence in new housing communities.

- The Revd Kim Shorley works on New Places for New People (see below)
- There will be a new District Digital Enabler, to support the District and Circuits to make the best use of online provision.

The Rev'd Kim Shorley was formally inducted by Synod, as a new District Officer.

She then spoke of her role in offering FEAST to the District. FEAST – Friends Eating and Sharing Together – is the Northampton District version of the Connexional strategy of New Places for New People. Its core is friendship – people meeting together in small groups, and using their common interest as a catalyst to affirm God's presence. Three pilots in the Nene Valley circuit had been a group around books, one around films, and a third around crafting. The groups had grown, and invited others to join. Her next step will be to create networkers of FEASTers round the District.

8. Update on Connexional Deliverance Strategy

The Rev'd Kate Strange, Chair of the Connexional panel on deliverance strategy and Deputy Chair of our District, updated us. The Conference had in 2022 agreed Guidelines on deliverance ministry, and a resource of authorised, trained people is being put in place. The first cohort of a Deliverance team has completed a year-long discernment process, and the closing date for the second cohort is 30th October. A new exorcism liturgy has been developed. This is a resource for the Methodist Church, and anyone seeking assistance should speak in the first instance to their District Chair.

9. The new candidating process

The Revd Bekkie Wright outlined the new process for people exploring what ministry – ordained or otherwise – God is calling them to. There are four elements:

- The Explore Programme of reflection, during which participants write a journal of their faith journey, shadow people in a circuit, work with an accompanist to identify areas to develop, and have an online course from September to May.
- DOVE 1 – Discerning Ordained Vocation. Participants sit with an advisory panel in the following September to explore what their vocation might be, ordained or lay.
- DOVE 2 - Participants present a portfolio, including video as well written material. The panel decide whether the participant should go forward, or what to focus on.
- A weekend gathering all candidates together, with group work and creative presentations in front of a panel.

The Chair thanked Bekkie Wright for her briefing, and urged us to explain this process to potential candidates. There is no longer a District element in the process.

10. Discrimination and Abuse Response Service

The Chair briefed Synod on this new service, for which Northampton District is a pilot. Anyone experiencing an instance of discrimination in the church can report it, and expect a confidential response within three working days. Circuits were asked to display the poster prominently.

11. Synod business

Report of the District Executive: The Synod Secretary referred to his written report.

Requests to cease worship

The District Executive recommended to Synod three requests to cease worship:

- Enderby Methodist Church in the Leicester West Circuit;
- Grimsbury Methodist Church in the Banbury Circuit;
- Sage Cross Methodist Church in the Melton Mowbray Circuit.

Synod agreed these recommendations.

The Chair offered a prayer of thanks for the witness of these churches, and emphasised that this was not the end of mission and ministry in the three places.

Synod approved a new constitution for Christchurch, Thame.

The Chair thanked the Rev'd John Anderson for his patient work as ecumenical officer to bring this to fruition, and prayed for the joint ecumenical work at Thame, under their new minister the Rev'd Hee Gon Moon.

Synod received the **Property Report**, with joy and thanks. The Chair noted the comment in the report about compliance with Annual Returns, and asked members of Synod for advice on how the process could be made easier.

The following nominations to District appointments were unanimously approved: the Rev'd Nathan Falla as Synod Precentor, and Mrs Jenny Oliver as Secretary of the District Executive. The Chair thanked the Rev'd Lesley Dinham for her service as Secretary of the District Executive, especially whilst carrying the superintendency of a single member circuit.

Synod confirmed all District appointments, as listed in the 2023/34 Synod Directory.

12. Safeguarding

The Chair welcomed Gill Crippen, the District Safeguarding Team Leader. Gill stressed that safeguarding was core to the mission of the church, so that the Mission Team and the Safeguarding Team work closely together. The church is unique as an institution, because it welcomes everyone, and so safeguarding is essential. Churches should ask the Safeguarding Team for help early, rather than waiting for a problem to develop. She would be retiring at the end of the year, after 19 years of service to the District. Grahame Snelling had joined the team temporarily, whilst her successor was being recruited.

The Chair gave deep thanks to Gill for her work, and also to Sue Ioannou, who was herself leaving after 6 years of work with the District on safeguarding. The Chair also acknowledged the work of

Pauline Jackson who had been sent a card of thanks with a gift from the Circuits. She was unable to be present that day. They had, as a team, developed standards of excellence that the rest of the Connexion have followed; they have shown deep care, and a commitment to keep children and vulnerable adults safe; and they have made safeguarding central to our discipleship.

Thanks were expressed to all those who had played a part in the organisation of the Synod.

13. Synod concluded with an act of worship led by Rev'd Canon Helen Cameron, Chair.

Next meetings

Spring Representative Synod - 27th April 2024 at Banbury.

Autumn Representative Synod – 7th September 2024 at Northampton.



Rev'd Helen D Cameron
District Chair



Paul Spray
Synod Secretary